

ADDRESS

BY

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ON

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AT

NORTON, MASS.

From Sumter to Appomattox marks a period in the history of our country that must forever challenge the interest of all mankind. The most exalted principles of liberty and humanity were on trial and at stake. All the world held its breath, and watched for the result of that fateful struggle between the people of this great American Nation. The circumstances that led up to the War of Secession are familiar to all who have reached or passed middle life, but as that generation is rapidly disappearing, and as an audience, like this to-day, is made up largely of those who have come on to the field since the Civil War, it may not be out of place to devote some of our time to a review of the history that led to that war.

To those of us who lived through the terribly vivid scenes of the irrepressible conflict, it is difficult to realize that it has all passed into history, and is hardly more a reality to the youth of to-day than the War of the Revolution. And when, perchance, we hear the ill-informed child ask what is the difference between the War of the Revolution and the War of the Rebellion, our whole nature suffers a shock, and we have a new and striking illustration of the healing power of time, and of the forgetfulness that embalms one short generation with oblivion.

It is never agreeable to reflect that the lives we are living, the history we are making, and the real things that are happening about us to-day, are so soon to be forgotten. The lessons of our Civil War were so full of import for us all, and had so much influence upon the human race, that it is fitting once a year, in the floral month of May, that we should meet together, heap garlands upon the graves of our nation's preservers, recall those days when liberty hung in the balance, and pledge our allegiance anew to our free American Republic.

It may be said that the first seeds of the War of Secession were sown by the Declaration of Independence in 1775,

watered by the Articles of Confederation in 1777, and developed by the Federal Constitution in 1787. No ranker weed or more noxious fungus ever grew in a nation's garden.

No more serious or momentous task ever confronted any body of men, than was undertaken by those fifty-five representatives who assembled in Convention in May, 1787, to revise the Articles of Confederation, and to draft a new Constitution for the union of the thirteen states. There was everything to prevent a consummation of such union, and to disrupt the feeling of interdependence that had sprung up under the Confederation. Indeed, so grave was the responsibility felt by every delegate, that even an atheist, who was a distinguished member, suggested that the Convention be opened with prayer, and the only reason the suggestion was not adopted, was lest the people should be led to realize how desperate the cause really was. So long as the Colonies stood before a common foe, it mattered little how slender was the tie that bound them together. So long as Britain's arm was raised to enslave and oppress them they paid but little heed to internal or interstate differences. No price seemed too dear to pay for American liberty. But after the treaty of peace was signed, and the foreign enemy had sailed away from our shores forever, our forefathers found themselves face to face, living under Articles of Confederation at once flimsy and indeterminate. The varied and diverse interests of the thirteen states found an early and vigorous expression in the Continental Congress and public assemblies.

The thirteen states had thirteen different constitutions, each jealously guarding some peculiar and individual interest. It is not strange under the circumstances that the flames of popular feeling threatened to burst forth at any time and overthrow the government.

The Continental Congress had practically no greater power than to recommend and entreat. It remained for each state to make requisitions and grant appropriations.

It was regarded as more of an honor to be a representative in the State Legislature than a representative in Congress.

There was really no National Government. It was simply a League of Sovereign States banded together for purposes offensive and defensive, and yet it was sufficient to carry our country through to a successful termination of the Revolutionary War.

In the language of Washington, "Success had but afforded the United States the opportunity of becoming a respectable nation." Alexander Hamilton wrote as follows: "A nation without a National Government is an awful spectacle. The establishment of a Constitution in a time of profound peace, by the voluntary consent of the whole people, is a prodigy to the completion of which I look forward with trembling anxiety."

So when the Convention assembled representing all of the thirteen states except Rhode Island, the work seemed well nigh hopeless. To smelt, mould, and weld all the discordant elements into a complete and concordant Constitution was an undertaking worthy the wisest and truest patriots that ever lived.

No state was willing to surrender any rights or privileges that it had hitherto enjoyed as a separate Commonwealth.

Slavery had been forced upon the Colonies by British avarice, and when the war broke out, it existed in all of the states and was strongly entrenched in six of them, while in the other seven there had already grown up an antipathy to the institution, which never diminished nor lost any of its force until the final abolition of slavery in bloodshed.

The African slave trade was in full force and was carried on under the law. Full recognition was demanded both of slavery and the slave trade. The Constitution thus became a patchwork of claims, concessions and compromises. Strong men and staunch patriots had labored with all their might to arrive at a safe and peaceful conclusion. They felt that they had done the best they could. Still in their minds was a lurking consciousness that there remained in the work a suppressed or hidden spark that might some day burst into flame and threaten the existence of the Republic.

The Constitutional Convention assembled in May, 1787, and finished its work in September of the same year. It adjourned to await the adoption of the Constitution by the State Conventions.

By its own provision the Constitution was to be established when nine of the thirteen states should adopt it. Delaware, the smallest state in population in the Union, was the first to adopt it, Dec. 7th, 1787, and on June 21st, 1788, New Hampshire, the ninth state, had accepted it. So that it became the great Common Law of the land from that date. The other states ratified it in due time, the last to signify its adherence being the smallest state in territory, Rhode Island, May 29th, 1790.

It was a critical period in the history of the country during those months in which the adoption of the Constitution hung in the balance. Predictions were freely made that it would never be accepted by the states, or, if accepted, it would fail of its purpose.

The French Revolution had broken out. The mob had beaten down the Bastille. France was drifting into a sea of human blood. The reign of terror had begun. What wonder then that Americans hesitated to commit themselves and their fortunes to a great general government of the people, whose interests were so diverse and whose homes lay in latitudes so wide apart.

In 1790 the United States emerged from a semi-chaotic existence to that of a full-fledged nation. At first the Congress of the United States addressed itself to the financial questions that were the legacy of the Continental Congress. For some years it found enough in these and in our foreign relations to occupy its attentions and best thoughts.

France, our Revolutionary ally, had sought to exact her reward for services rendered, and harrassed our commerce whenever she could. Napoleon viewed us with a jealous eye, and there is little doubt that had he succeeded in establishing an empire in Europe he would have sought conquests in America.

England arrogantly maintained her right to impress our seamen into her service, and it took a second war to establish our independence on the high seas as well as on land.

All questions that touched upon State Rights were carefully avoided. These only forced themselves upon public attention when new states came knocking at the door of Congress for admission to the Union.

In 1819 Missouri was admitted after a sharp contest in Congress as to whether she ^{sh}would have the right to hold slaves or not. Nearly all of the Northern Representatives voted No, and the Southern Representatives Yes. The result was what was known as the Missouri Compromise, which was enacted in 1820, permitting slavery in Missouri, but restricting it thereafter to territory lying south of latitude 36° 30". From the beginning violent disagreements had been ~~ad~~verted by a provision to admit two states at the same time, one Southern Slave State and one Northern Free State.

But the day came when this equilibrium was disturbed. More Northern than Southern territories became qualified for statehood.

In 1854 the Missouri Compromise was practically repealed by what is known as the Kansas and Nebraska Act, which provided that slavery might exist in the territory if it was so decided by a vote of the people. From this moment political history was made rapidly.

The Ship of State was encountering a stormy sea which was fast driving her upon the rocks of civil strife. So long as the Democratic party was in power, no overt act was committed and any outbreak was delayed.

The slave power was aggressive and would broke ^{ok} no restraint. It was jealous of any move that contemplated interference with slavery, or that tended to restrict its extension.

In 1856 the Republican party came into existence, whose chief tenet was opposition to the extension of slavery. There and then was the gage thrown down, and the South was not slow to take it up.

The new party failed to elect its president in its first cam-

paign. Had it been successful there is little doubt that the war would have come a few years earlier, and there is also a chance that it would have been a year or two shorter, as the four years of Mr. Buchanan's administration were utilized to put the South into fighting order, thereby giving them an unequal advantage at the start.

The Republican party, however, lost none of its political advantage, but rather gained in its influence with the people, so that in 1860 it elected its president.

This was the signal for the uprising that had long been contemplated by the slave states, which were determined never to submit to Republican rule.

The day that the Republican party was born, the South took fright. It foresaw at once that the restriction of Slavery meant its final extinction, and from that moment it left no stone unturned to undermine the power of the National Government. A weak president, who, in his paradoxical two-fold manifesto, declared that secession was unconstitutional, but that coercion was illegal, and a Secretary of War, who was a traitor to his heart's core, readily lent themselves to the fiendish purposes of the nation's destroyers.

Northern armories were stripped of their arms and munitions. Northern forts were dismantled and left defenceless. So that when the war broke out, it was found that the South was nearly a year ahead of the North in its armaments and general preparedness for active hostilities.

There is no more pathetic chapter in the history of our country than that which relates the events between the election of Lincoln in November, 1860, and his Inauguration in March, 1861. Pity that it should ever be written. It would be a farce if it were not a tragedy. There was treachery in high places among avowed secessionists. A truckling and cowering spirit on the part of Congress. Offers of concessions on all hands to the slave power which were met only with derision. Cowards, dough-faces and mercenaries, were the epithets applied to Northerners. All this was endured with a desire to avoid an open rupture, but it was not,—as

has been frequently represented,—in a pusillanimous spirit, for in a moment as if by magic all was changed.

One gray morning in April, 1861, the news came flashing over the wires up from the South, that the rebels had opened fire on Fort Sumter. All the patriotic blood was roused to action. The spirit of Lexington, Bunker Hill, Ticonderoga, Saratoga, and Trenton, animated the whole North.

Party spirit vanished and all moved forward as with one accord to meet the rebellious host. In a few short hours, the tramp of loyal legions was heard throughout the North. The keynote was sounded by General Dix, whose brave words rang out as with a trumpet tone, and were taken up and repeated from one end of the country to the other, "If any man hauls down the American Flag, shoot him on the spot."

When the arch traitor Ruffin pulled the lanyard on that first gun in Charleston harbor, he brought down about his ears the very bulwark of Slavery,—State rights,—and sealed forever its doom on the American Continent. That he afterwards perished by his own hand rather than live under the American Flag, shows the intensity of bitterness that existed in the hearts of secessionists.

How the people flew to arms is perhaps better remembered than any particular events or battles of the war. To those who took part there was nothing more impressive than the answer to that first call to arms.

Men who had left home in the morning with no thought of war, shouldered their muskets and never saw their homes again.

Men left their business, their professions, their studies, their work of every kind, dropped their books and tools right where they were, took up the sword and musket, and never put off their uniforms nor laid down their arms until the surrender of Lee at Appomattox.

Some went forth as to a holiday, but most of them went with a firm purpose to put down the rebellion and save the country, or to perish in the attempt.

No thought of danger, no thought of privation, no thought

of pay, held them back. Only one thought tugged at their heartstrings, the leaving of wife, children, mother and sister, but God be praised, the women, never less brave than the men, bade their dear ones Godspeed, and then turned to take up the doubled work of their home life, with a new prayer upon their lips, that a Merciful Providence would spare their own.

The object and the limit of an address like this, makes it in vain to recall the particular incidents of the Civil War, or to go over the battles by land and sea that won renown for our arms, and peace and liberty for all our people. Honor and glory belong alike to those who carried the sword and the musket.

In New York City is reared a monument which has just been dedicated with fitting ceremony, and entombs the ashes of our great leader, the invincible, the magnanimous, the silent warrior, who won victory, and even admiration from his enemies.

Though this monument marks a great hero's grave and stands for achievements unsurpassed in the world's history, it is none the less a memorial sacred to those brave men who stood with him at Fort Donelson, at Chattanooga, at Vicksburg, and in the Wilderness. Could his silent lips have spoken on the day of dedication, would they not have said, "Remember my comrades too"?

Our own Boston to-day is paying tribute to that brave white officer who led to war a regiment of colored comrades, though he knew that they and he would be shining marks for rebel bullets. They stood together, they fell together, they were buried together, and their bones mingled in a common grave.

No armored knight, in mail of steel, ever went forth to meet a foe so panoplied with all that was true and loyal, as Col. Robert G. Shaw, who perished with his sable comrades about him. Though black their skins in the sight of men, their souls are white in the sight of God.

My comrades, it has been your privilege to relight and

keep burning the real camp fires of American liberty. It was not alone that you saved the Union and freed the slave, it was not alone that you established the greatest and freest government in all the world. You did even more than this. By your ready answer to a country's call, by your sacrifice of yourselves, by your privations and sufferings, and by your many deeds of valor, you showed to the nation and the world what a patriot was willing to do. Had your efforts been futile, the spirit with which you made them was worth the price and terrible experience of the war.

So when the historian is summing up the cost and results of the war, let not this be left out of the account; that your prompt and patriotic action not only saved the country, but gave an example of devotion that will not be forgotten and will forever be a safeguard against another internal war.

When honest pensioners are flouted as looters of the United States Treasury, let this be their answer, "It was not for money that we entered the service of our Country. When we enlisted, we never asked what we were to receive. We sprang to the Nation's defence, not asking for money, not asking even for gratitude."

The impulse was patriotism. Any other spirit than the pure love of country would have led to disaster. Had the war been a mercenary undertaking, it would have been a failure. All the money in the world could not buy patriotism, and without that all would have been lost.

The lesson of to-day will be wasted upon us and we shall fail to realize its full significance if we do not contemplate the results of the war in their relation to our whole country.

The contest was ended nearly a generation ago and there is nothing to be gained by fighting its battles over again.

This is a day when the noblest emotions should be allowed free play.

There is nothing more precious to us than that which we have bought with our blood. Yes, and with our blood we have bought a free country, free from Lake to Gulf, from Ocean to Ocean, free, every foot of it, and it is ours, all ours.

And so I say let us love it all, not one State alone, not one section alone. That is not patriotism in its full sense. To love our country is to love it all.

This is the sentiment I would rouse within your breasts to-day. This is the patriotism that I would stir within you. Not that you should love your own State or home the less. A poltroon indeed is he who will not stand by his own. But this may only be when our own is assailed.

There is no longer any reason why we should array State against State, or section against section. The plague spot of human slavery is wiped from our escutcheon and all the statecraft in the world cannot restore it.

The country is no longer living a lie before God and man. All men *are* born free and equal. There is no National crime that all the States do not share alike.

Therefore, now, no good reason exists why any State should withhold the hand of friendship from all its neighbors. Should not the old State of Massachusetts be always foremost with the olive.

While we love our Commonwealth and believe in her, let us not be blinded with vain-glory. Let us bear in mind that we are not without sin. Let us not forget that slavery once dwelt within our borders, and was abolished only because it was found unprofitable. Let us not forget that here we once burned people alive on the superstitious charge of witchcraft.

We can only know what real independence and liberty are by obeying, ourselves, the first law of liberty, to respect the rights of others.

American liberty exists only by the grace of God and the good will and consent of the people. It is not gifted with immortality. It is not an *Ægis* set up over heads to which we may fly for protection. It may be torn down at any moment and dragged in the dust. It may be violated and humiliated in the very citadel of its defenders.

The foundation stone of liberty lies in the character of the people themselves, in that spirit of selflessness that counts the

rights of the whole people as paramount to those of the individual, in that willingness to subordinate all personal ambitions to the rights of others.

This is the essential virtue of patriotism and is stimulated into activity whenever our common rights are in peril from within or without.

It has been said that "To love our country with ardor, we must sometimes have fears for its safety, our affections will be exalted in its distress and our self esteem will glow in the contemplation of its glory."

When we shall all realize and understand that the sovereignty of the people ruling the people, means that every citizen shall act toward his neighbor upon the principles of absolute truth, and justice, and humanity, then shall we know the best form of government, and the highest state of civilization of which mankind is capable. Then shall one Church, one Creed, and one Commandment suffice for all. Then will earth be raised toward Heaven, and Heaven be brought to earth.

When the great clock of the universe shall point to the millennial hour, and the everlasting bells of time shall ring in that glorious morrow, then may it be found that all the people of this American Republic shall stand ready to hail the Messenger, who shall once more proclaim, "Peace on earth, good will toward men."